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The first of a series of three projects was designed to study the responses of children and their parents in an effort to formulate an experimental guidance program. A group of 111 ninth grade students who live in low-rent districts was studied. In addition to the analysis of the students, school records, aptitude tests, and preference tests, the parents were interviewed. Findings suggest that short-term efforts to help parents of students with higher aptitudes motivate their children might be effective if the parents have a generally high educational level and if the student has high vocational aspirations; efforts to guide parents of students with below average scores would require longer term, more extensive services. Student preference tests indicated that the guidance programs should influence the talented youngster to improve his school performance. The second project was a guideline program designed, in light of information obtained in the first study, to help parents develop talents and abilities of their ninth-grade children. Each family received one to six individual conferences and six two-hour group information sessions. The third project was similar to the second with the exception that it was aimed at the families of seventh-grade students.							
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**GUIDING PARENTS AND MOTIVATING TALENTED
STUDENTS WHO LIVE IN LOW-RENT NEIGHBORHOODS ***

by

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New Rochelle Public Schools

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* A report of three projects undertaken by members of the Guidance Department of the New Rochelle Public Schools, conducted in cooperation with the Bureau of Guidance, New York State Education Department, with support of NDEA Title V-A funds.

This paper to be read on August 30, 1962, at 1:00 p.m., in a session on Student Motivation at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association. Portions of this paper were read, by invitation, to a meeting of the New York State Association of Deans and Guidance Personnel, November 13, 1961, at Liberty, New York and to a meeting sponsored by the Westchester Association of School Psychologists, October 27, 1961, at Pelham, New York.

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Traditionally, the American youngster living in a poor neighborhood has had to push his way up the educational or vocational ladder depending mainly upon personal or family resources. It was the exceptional student who was able to overcome the handicaps of a poor environment and develop his talent or ability. The present generation has begun to recognize that the utilization of human potentialities must not depend on chance nor can the utilization of talent remain arbitrary or accidental. Not only is there a loss to the individual, family and community when talent is wasted, but the absence of sufficient numbers of educated and talented people in this nation can seriously affect our ultimate welfare. Perhaps now as under-developed areas of the world are asking to share our scientists, teachers and technologists, the acute shortages of trained and able persons begin to have special sociological and psychological meaning as well as economic significance.

Students who live in low-rent neighborhoods generally approach school learning tasks with little interest and poor motivation. School systems have struggled to educate such students and usually have found that these youngsters are difficult to reach with traditional educational and guidance efforts. Among the factors which tend to reduce effective guidance efforts for students in poor environments are:

1. Poor communication between home and school;
2. Little real knowledge about the underlying values and goals of each student and his family;
3. The paucity of research and information to guide professionals in their efforts to help these students use their abilities in school and to make appropriate plans for the future.

Of major concern to those who seek to promote the full use of student talent and ability is the effect of parental attitudes and values on students who live in poor neighborhoods. Any school program which plans to promote the development of talent and abilities of students whose families have limited financial resources must consider the major problems which interfere with student progress and motivation and attempt to establish ways of dealing with those problems.

Efforts to bring about changes in attitude in order to encourage "deprived" students to appreciate and use the educational resources available to them probably will require school and guidance personnel to reach into their homes and to establish communication and relationships in order to deal with personal, family and community influences. It probably will be necessary to develop and adapt such efforts to the needs of parents who have economic and personal difficulties which tend to keep them from working in cooperation with interested professionals seeking to help the schools encourage their children to succeed.

PURPOSE OF PROJECTS

It was the general purpose of the series of projects developed in New Rochelle to obtain and study certain responses of the parents of children living in poor neighborhoods and to organize an experimental program which would seek to guide parents to help their junior high school age children to succeed in school and to plan for their future. It was believed that the

non-school environmental influences which play a part in shaping the attitudes and ambitions of students who live in low-rent districts required more intensive examination in order to study those separate characteristics which generally are not given careful scrutiny.

METHODS

The New Rochelle projects were designed to establish channels of communication with parents who generally did not visit the school: (1) in order to obtain a sample of parental opinion to shed some light on specific types of family influence and their characteristics, and (2) to provide more intensive counseling, information and guidance services not usually possible in the regular school program. It was expected that this approach might also help initiate greater home-school interest and planning.

It was not expected that a sample of parental opinion or student ability indices chosen on the basis of residence in a low-rent district would be homogeneous. The research staff expected to obtain a wide range of difference for many questions and a narrower range for certain questions, for example, questions on parent level of education. It was also expected that although one might predict lower mean test scores for students living in poor neighborhoods, there would be variations of abilities for the group as a whole as well as a wide range of differences for individuals. Because of the range expected within the sample, it was decided to separate the accumulated data into "High" (upper half) and "Low" ability groups and compare the parental responses. In addition, an examination of the data suggested that the top twenty students (in terms of ability) represented a somewhat discrete group within the sample. Therefore, it was considered of value to study and treat the findings for the top group as a separate entity.

A composite score of the 8 Differential Aptitude Tests was used as the criterion for ability for the 9th grade population studied. The raw test scores were converted to stanines based upon norms developed for a city-wide 9th grade population of 740 students.

PROCEDURES

A sample of 111 ninth-grade students who lived in the low-rent districts served by two junior high schools was selected for the initial study. It was possible to accumulate school records that were complete and to secure the cooperation of 81 parents of the chosen sample. Five guidance counselors interviewed the parents at home, using a standard schedule developed for this survey. The schedule asked for identifying data and requested information about the student's health, behavior and attitudes, as well as a sample of the parents' opinions. Both parents were encouraged to give their responses to all of the 18 questions contained in the parent opinion section of the schedule--the complete schedule contained 37 questions. It was possible for one of the parents, or for the parents jointly to answer the 19 preliminary questions which covered family statistics and the student's characteristics.

A second project was undertaken following the accumulation of data secured from the initial project. There were 40 families involved in the project which

was designed to help them develop the talent and ability of their 9th-grade youngsters, through the use of individual counseling sessions and group information sessions. These were families who, for the most part, lived in the poorer neighborhoods of New Rochelle. Their youngsters were selected on the basis of high (upper 23%) scores on one or more sections of the Differential Aptitude Test Battery (except for the spelling test). This special program was conducted during the months of February, March, April and May of 1961.

Eighty-seven families of the selected youngsters, chosen by the school counselors serving the ninth-grade, were requested to participate in this project. Forty families were able or willing to cooperate. Twenty-four of the families had children in one junior high school district and 16 families lived in a second junior high school district. There were 22 ninth-grade boys and 19 ninth-grade girls in the 40 families involved in the second project.

The goals of the staff engaged in this project were:

1. To establish contact with "hard to reach" families;
2. To develop a school-home relationship with these families;
3. To provide information and guidance to help the families guide their youngsters;
4. To help the parents motivate and encourage their youngsters to improve their performances in school;
5. To help the parents and the youngsters toward appropriate goals; and
6. To help the families and youngsters appreciate appropriate standards.

The staff sought to increase the parents' awareness of the students' interests, abilities and aptitudes. It was also necessary to help the families isolate some of the "stumbling blocks" which may have been interfering with school progress. Some of the parents and youngsters were helped to understand the factors which led to underachievement, lack of motivation and to inadequate values. It was possible to provide individual guidance to all of the participants and to listen at length to their concerns and to help them obtain information about college programs, scholarships and training programs.

Each family was given an appointment to meet with a guidance counselor in the evening for a personal interview. During this "intake" interview a form was completed showing pertinent information and listing family-student interests and concerns. An orientation was given to the family in this session, explaining the purposes of the project and the way the evening counseling staff planned to function.

A third project using similar counseling procedures with 7th-grade students and their parents has followed the initial studies.

RESULTS OF INITIAL STUDY

Aptitude Test Scores.

A comparison of the Differential Aptitude Test scores of the 9th-grade students from one junior high school (who lived in poor neighborhoods) with the full school results showed significantly lower aptitude test scores for the selected group. Table 1 shows that the selected group mean scores were close to 1 standard deviation below the school mean scores for the Verbal, Numerical, and Abstract tests whereas the Clerical, Spelling, and Space test mean differences between the compared groups were significant but not as large as for the aforementioned. The Mechanical and Sentences mean test results of the selected group compared with the school results were about $1/2$ and $3/4$ standard deviations apart respectively.

Parent Educational Level.

A comparison of the average grade level of school completed by parents of the upper $1/2$ (based on DAT total score) versus the lower $1/2$ showed the fathers of the more able (based on the DAT) had approximately 3 years more of school than the fathers of those making lower $1/2$ scores.

Student Vocational Plans.

There were significant differences between the vocational plans of the "high scoring" (upper half on the DAT) students and the "low scoring" (lower half on the DAT) students. A larger number of the "more able" boys expected to enter executive jobs whereas a larger number of the "low scorers" expected to enter clerical, skilled and semi-skilled occupations--this was also true for girls.

Hobbies.

The "high scorers" had a larger number of hobbies (i.e. more than one hobby) than the "low scorers". The low scoring girls had the fewest hobbies and interests.

Likes and Dislikes.

The most frequent "likes" of the high and low scoring boys were (1) sports, (2) clothing, (3) money, in this order. The girls differed from the boys in respect to likes and clothing was indicated as the number 1 "like". The upper scoring girls were said to like sports as a number 2 "like" whereas the lower scoring girls were said to like money as a second "like". Both upper and lower scorers were said to like music as a third place "like". Boys in the upper half (DAT score) disliked school and housework most, in that order whereas the boys in the lower half (DAT score) were not indicated as disliking school. The lower scoring girls were said to dislike (1) housework, and (2) school.

TABLE 1**MEAN D.A.T. TEST SCORES OF SELECTED 9TH GRADE STUDENTS*
COMPARED WITH TOTAL SCHOOL GRADE 9 RESULTS**

D.A.T. TEST	SELECTED GROUP			TOTAL GROUP		
	N	Mean Score	S.D.	N	Mean Score	t
Verbal	52	3.71	1.96	454	5.53	6.696
Numerical	52	3.73	1.54	455	5.46	8.099
Abstract	52	3.37	1.49	456	5.26	9.144
Space	52	4.21	1.45	460	5.10	3.055
Mechanical	52	3.85	1.34	459	5.10	4.953
Clerical	50	4.72	1.92	455	5.51	2.909
Spelling	51	4.55	2.10	452	5.35	2.720
Sentences	51	3.84	2.05	452	5.44	5.573

Note: Differences between means of selected students versus total 9th grade school group are significant at .01 level. The results given above are in Stanine units based upon city-wide 9th Grade Norms.

* The selected students were all 9th grade students judged as living in low-rent districts attending one of the two junior high schools in the City.

TABLE 2

(N = 80)

**AVERAGE GRADE OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY FATHERS
AND MOTHERS OF STUDENTS LIVING IN POOR NEIGHBORHOODS
SHOWN FOR THE UPPER AND LOWER HALF
OF THE GROUP BASED ON DAT SCORE**

D. A. T. SCORE	Parents Average Grade Completed	
	Fathers	Mothers
Upper Half	11.2	10.2
Lower Half	8.3	9.8

These findings suggested that short-term efforts to help parents of students with higher aptitude test scores motivate their children might be effective in the light of the generally higher educational level of the parents and the students' vocational aspirations, whereas efforts to guide parents of students with below average scores would require longer term, more extensive services.

Because the high scorers were indicated to have interest in several hobbies and in sports, and the evidence of a general dislike of school, it was proposed that a direct approach to the problem of low school interest should be attempted in the proposed projects to influence the talented youngster to improve his school performance.

COUNSELING TO GUIDE AND MOTIVATE - PROJECT 2

Each cooperating family had from 1 to 6 individual conferences, depending on the needs and desires of the participants. There were also seven group sessions available to the families and the youngsters. The first "intake" interview was followed by an "exploratory" session with the high school guidance staff member, and a third "personal" session was provided by the counseling psychologist staff member.

There were four two-hour group sessions to provide information on college entrance requirements and scholarships. In addition there were two evening two-hour group sessions on motivation and adolescent adjustment. One group session was to provide information on the role of the counselor.

Following the sessions, evaluation sheets were given to the parents, to the students, and to a 9th grade regular school counselor for opinions about the project.

Evaluation sheets received from 28 of the 40 participating families revealed that all except one of those responding felt they were helped. One student was not sure he had been helped. The parents of seven of the students indicated that the youngsters studied more as a result of this project. Representative phrases taken from the parents' and students' evaluation sheets are listed below:

"It was an opportunity for the whole family to be counseled."

"The student has more self confidence."

"We have been able to make a better choice of a high school program."

"We have a new orientation toward the future."

"We have noticed improved homework habits."

"The student studies more, harder, and tries more."

"We have a better knowledge of where to place our emphasis and our efforts."

"We were helped in our long range planning."

"We have the feeling that school personnel are vitally interested in each pupil."

"Our youngster is more relaxed, calmer about entering high school."

"It helped our youngster to understand his abilities."

"Our youngster is more interested in schoolwork."

"Our youngster's opinions and attitudes toward school were changed."

"It helped answer our questions."

"It was a chance for parents to express themselves."

"Our youngster is better adjusted."

"We understand our youngster better."

"He has made better marks in school since the project."

"Our plans are changed. We now have hopes for a college education for our youngster."

"Our daughter now plans to go to college."

Additional comments indicating what the parents would like to have changed or improved in connection with this project are listed below:

"A better explanation of the overall intent of the program."

"Program should start at the beginning of the school year (rather than in February)."

"Field trips should be involved."

"More of this type of program."

"The program was too short - should be longer."

"The program should reach more people and be on a bigger scale."

Recommendations for another year, based on staff experience with this project are:

1. A follow-up of the present 9th grade group through grades 10 and 11 with help for the family and the youngster in reaching the personal goals of the student and the family.

2. Provide the same type of program for succeeding 9th grade students each year.
3. Begin a similar program for 7th and 8th grade students with follow-up in the later grades.
4. Initiate a similar program to reach families of youngsters in the elementary school grades.

It should be pointed out that the staff felt there was a personal growth from the project which might best be described as:

1. Increasing the sensitivity of the counselors to the feelings of the students and families who live in poor neighborhoods.
2. Increasing the awareness of the kinds of problems that parents and youngsters face within poor environments.

The provision of a "clinical" counseling approach in the sense that the parents and youngsters had full periods of "private" time, reserved exclusively for guidance and personal help, seemed to promote a growth in counseling skills of the staff.

It was the general feeling of the staff that the sincere good will established by this program and the expressed appreciation of parents and students provided an incentive to motivate the counselor himself to achieve progress with the families in the program.

A basic recommendation important for other schools attempting a program in the area covered in this report would be to select the staff carefully. Persons attempting this kind of project should have empathy for people who live in poor neighborhoods as well as high professional skill in establishing and maintaining good personal relationships.

Project No. 3 provided counseling and psychological services to 40 families of 7th grade students. It was similar to Project 2 in design and procedure. The staff experienced more difficulty in securing the cooperation of the 7th grade students and parents, compared with 9th grade students and families. A fourth project is being planned which will provide intensive services for 150 students in grades 6-10, with provisions for long-term (3 to 4 years) guidance and evaluation.